"The Disappearance of Brown"

The Black Cat

March 1905

The Disappearance of Brown.
$150 Prize.
John Trask.

Under the Door of the Doghole.
Holman Day.

A Frontier Rivalry.
$150 Prize.
John Cain.

Moonshine Sim.
George W. Summers.

The Last Man's Club.
Robert M. Clutch.

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The Disappearance of Brown.*

BY JOHN TRASK.

THIS is precisely what occurred: Brown and I were walking through the pastures back of Weaver, waste level upland, with nothing in the world but short dry grass and sheep-sorrel, and here and there a little bunch of scrub huckleberry, less than two feet high. They were blasting off toward Palmerston, about two miles beyond us in the valley, blowing the trees out of an old orchard, a thing that I had seen done once or twice before in other sections of the country.

"Look," Brown said, and we stopped, at the rumble that reached us at that distance, to watch the old tree rise in the puff of smoke and stand on its head for a moment in the air.

"There's no way like it for getting out the roots," I said to Brown, but — Brown was gone! Brown — who one moment previous stood by my side, pointing with his hand toward Palmerston, and from whom I had turned my eyes for the space of time that it takes a tree blown out of the ground by a charge of dynamite to rise into the air and fall — was wiped out as completely as though he had never been.

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I had rather not attempt to describe my feelings at the moment. I don't care to recall them any more distinctly than is necessary.

"Brown," I whispered. I took off my hat and wiped my forehead with my handkerchief. I don't know how long I stood, looking around, looking at the ground, looking up. "Brown!" I yelled. "Brown! Brown, Brown, Brown!" I had the valley yelling Brown.

Then I sat down and began to think. Sitting there on the dry grass, hugging my knees, I did the hardest thinking I had done in all my life. Brown was beside me, was the proposition with which I started, and half a moment later he was not there. Brown was there and — *presto!* he was not. Well, then! *Well, then!* Had he run away? He would have had to run, if any aberration had prompted him to do so, for fifteen minutes in any direction before I should have been able to lose sight of him. And Brown couldn't run. Brown was not young. His little grandchildren had come in to play with mine before we started for our walk.

Had he hidden? If any sudden playfulness, quite foreign to his nature, had prompted him to try to hide, he would still have had to run for fifteen minutes. There was no tree, no rock, nothing, for a mile. The little scattered clumps of huckleberry would not have hidden a baby, much less a tall man in plaid golf trousers and a black alpaca coat. Brown was evidently not on the earth. Was he in it? If any mine had opened under him, or grave, or hole, there would have *been* a hole. There would have had to be at least some slight disturbance of the surface of the hard-baked ground, and not so much as a pebble was disturbed. If the earth had opened and closed again — if, I say, an earthquake, whose shock I did not feel, had swallowed Brown, standing three feet from me — there would have had to be some traces of a crack. If any flying creature had swooped down for him — my mind was ready to grasp at anything as I gazed up into the speckless blue above the pasture — I should have seen him in the air. For, as far up as the eye could travel on a clear June afternoon, Brown was not in the air. If Brown was neither on the earth nor in it nor above it, what, I demanded, had become of Brown?

I reviewed the one thing which stood between me and belief in

miracles. We had not had any wine on the table that day, nor the day before it, nor the day before. To my certain knowledge, I had not had so much as a glass of claret in a week. I had started for my walk with Brown with as clear a head, and in as sane, healthy spirits as I had ever known. I put my face into my hands and groaned. When I, Peter Smith, am driven to believe in miracles, I have very nearly lost my grip.

"You're not looking very well, father," my daughter said to me when I finally did reach home, after sitting for about three hours, staring, in the pasture. "Oh, I'm feeling quite well, daughter," I replied. I went down town, finding it impossible to stay in the house. Brown's house was half-way down the block, on the way to town, and I went around the other way. Go past Brown's house, and meet his little grandchildren, and Mrs. Brown, and have them ask me where he was? My mind went ahead of me over all the train of dreadful consequences, never precedented, that must begin that very night when Brown was missed from tea. Contingencies of which I had not thought in my contemplation of their grief and the fruitless search that there would be for him began to dawn on me. What if they should say that I had murdered Brown?

About halfway to town I met Chalmers, and he stopped, as he always did, to chat. "By the way," he said, "have you seen Brown? He was asking for you." I moistened my lips. "When?" I asked. Chalmers did not seem to notice that there was anything unusual in my tone. "Why, about an hour ago," he said. "I saw him in town. He said he left you over in the pasture."

Chalmers evidently had seen him. No one but Brown and I knew of our going to the pastures. We had not known, ourselves, when we started out, that we were going there, having been taken there by merest fancy. It was not a usual walk for us, or any one, to take, owing to the blackberry swamps through which one must wade before coming to the uplands. Brown, then, had been seen since he left me and had spoken of our being together in the pastures! Brown had been seen in Weaver while I still sat staring at the spot where he had disappeared.

"Yes, he did leave me," I said. "So he wanted to see me?"

"Well, no," Chalmers answered, "come to think of it. I guess

all he said was that he left you to finish up your walk and came on home."

"I — I want to see *him*," I responded. "Do you know where he is?"

"Why, not exactly," Chalmers said. "I think, though, that he did say he was on his way to Simms'."

I thanked Chalmers and got away. If there was one place where Brown would be likely to be found, or to have been seen, if he were really in the flesh in Weaver, it was at the office of his old insurance partner and crony, Abel Simms. He had been there for almost an hour, Simms told me when I reached the office, and had gone out not more than fifteen minutes before I came. Not as much as that, the office-boy said — not more than ten. It seemed hard to doubt the evidence of three persons, all of whom I should have said that morning were sane, ordinary people, that Brown really was in Weaver in the flesh.

I ceased to speculate; I merely went out into the street with one object in life — to find Brown. If there were people who could see him, was my only reasoning, I could see him too. Not knowing what else to do I went to the postoffice, and there he was. He stood with his back to me, in the same golf-trousers, the same coat and cap in which I saw him last, reading his evening paper and waiting for the distribution of the mail. After standing for a moment in the doorway, to steady myself, I walked up to him. Although face to face with the unbelievable experience, I did not doubt, when I saw him, that it was Brown as I had seen him last. In addition to the testimony of three other persons I was able to credit what my eyes could see. It was Brown or I was not Smith — and I *was* Smith. The Smiths had never yet seen ghosts. I laid my hand on his shoulder.

"Brown!" I said. I tried to control my voice but I was conscious that it was shaking like a leaf.

"Hello!" he answered, looking up. "Got back? I wouldn't have deserted you if I hadn't thought of an appointment that I had to keep with Simms."

I took my old neighbor by the shoulders, almost by the throat.

"Brown!" I cried. "For God's sake, Brown!"

He shook me off, while the boards in the postoffice floor swam beneath my feet.

"What's the matter with you, Smith?" he said.

That interview in the postoffice, and another that I had with Brown that evening in his room, in which I begged him almost on bended knee, and as he would leave me sanity, to tell me what had happened in the pasture, and was as deliberately put off, were the last occasions on which we spoke to one another in two years.

Although I told no one, not wishing to be considered crazy, of the experience that would have upset my reason if the Smiths had been the kind that went insane, there were others who began to say queer things of Brown. In less than two months from his disappearance from beside me in the pasture there was no one else who was talked about in Weaver. Those who had known him the longest and most intimately said openly that there was something which they did not understand. Brown had had no business that would call him out of town since he dissolved his partnership with Abel Simms, and had always had a marked dislike to leaving home; he had not been known in ten years to go away from Weaver, yet he now went constantly, no one knew for what, no one was able to discover where. Evidently to a distance, since he was sometimes gone for days. It was said that, although he was known to be gone, no one had ever seen him come or go. He avoided his friends and made it impossible for them to approach him on the subject or to draw him into talk. His family shared his reticence, whether they shared the secret of the mystery surrounding him or not. There were men entertained at his house who had never been seen before in Weaver and whom no one knew. Although Brown's associations had never been with any but the plainest people it was rumored that they were persons of wealth and note. A man of distinguished appearance, inquiring by mistake at the house opposite, for Brown, proved to be the Governor of the adjoining state. Those who came to see him were as secret, as mysterious in their actions, as was Brown himself. Although they were seen to come they were never seen to go. The neighbor who lived next-door to Brown declared that she heard queer noises in his cellar. The strangest stories were afloat.

Though Brown had no business, and his income was known to be no more than enough to keep his family comfortable in a very moderate way, in six months' time he had bought the most expensive site in Weaver and had begun to build the finest house that had ever been erected as a dwelling in the state. If anything could have added to the excitement that agitated Weaver it was the announcement that when his house was finished Brown would give a dinner to his friends and had declared that I would come. All Weaver knew of our quarrel, and, although it did not know its cause, connected it with the mystery surrounding Brown. I swore that as my name was Peter Smith I would not go, but I went. That which took me was what no man, even a Smith, could resist. On the day before the dinner I received a note from Brown. "Come," it said, "and I will tell you what you want to hear."

Brown's house, on the hill above the town, with the fortune that had been spent on its pictures and its tapestries, was but a tithe of the marvels through which he led us. He showed us his stables and his horses, we walked through his summer-houses and his pergolas, the table to which we sat down in his gorgeous dining-room, with its flowers and its candles, was such as no one in Weaver had ever seen. We were served on silver dishes and waited on by servants who glided up and down behind our chairs.

But I had no eyes for anything nor any one but Brown who sat in the midst of all his splendor chatting to Simms as though his relations with Weaver were the same that they had always been. Chalmers, who sat next to me, remarked in my ear that it was odd that Brown had served no wine with such a dinner, an omission which I had not noticed, having come to hear with a clear head and sober mind what Brown had to say.

I found that it was the general impression that he would explain that night his unaccountable behavior and the mysterious acquisition of his wealth. Others who had cut Brown's acquaintance had come for the same reason that I had done, having received notes similar to mine. We appeared to be seated at the table but we were all on tiptoe, and when the last course of the dinner had been taken out and only one servant remained in the room, stand-

ing as though he were waiting for a signal, Brown arose to speak. It was almost as if he had heard Chalmers' words.

"Before I make my old friends welcome to the new house," he began, "with some good wine which I have been saving especially for the occasion, there is a story which I would like to tell." Although all Weaver, in the persons of those present, was hanging on what he was about to say, he looked across at me. "My old friend, Peter Smith," he said, "in fact, all my old friends, as I believe, have been feeling that they have not understood me lately, and I would like to go back a little to explain."

I can best tell the story that he told us, and that is known and has been verified to every person in that section of the country, in Brown's own words:

"A little over two years ago," he said, "as Smith will tell you, we were walking one afternoon, he and I, through the pastures back of town. They were blasting over toward Palmerston, blowing the trees out of a field, as, the last thing that I remember, I was pointing out to Smith. The next thing of which I was conscious was of coming to myself in a place in which both the light and odor were perplexing, and of feeling along a floor. I had no notion what had happened, nor how long I had been there, and it took my eyes some time to get accustomed to the peculiar light. Creeping along, as I said, and feeling with my hands, I touched first one object and then another, and I began to see all around me, as my eyes were able to make them out, objects which gave me in a flash a suspicion of what it was that had occurred. A little further investigation, in which I very nearly lost my senses, made clear to me just what had happened to me, and where I was. I was in, I had found by the most amazing accident, a place of whose possible existence I had heard legends when I was a boy, and to stories about which I had sat and listened open-mouthed when the old men who came to see my grandfather talked around the fire. I had stumbled, in the most unheard of and yet wholly natural way, on a treasure worth a monarch's ransom and to be had merely for the taking, next which we here in Weaver had lived for almost two hundred years. I made my way back to Weaver — I discovered a way back — and found out from Smith that he thought a miracle had

occurred. I have been disposing of my treasure secretly, by night, to those who were able and more than willing to take it off my hands, which will account for all you have considered strange. I have kept it secret, not out of distrust of the good intentions of my friends, but because of others, feeling that it would be impossible to keep a thing so remarkable from spreading if once it passed beyond me, and having no other way to protect the fortune I had found.

"Smith," he said, "when I stepped forward to point out that tree to you, I stepped into the little huckleberry bush just ahead of me, and not three feet from you, and went straight through it. The hole, through which I slipped, which made the chimney of a cave, had been put there, under one clump among five thousand others, for the purpose of concealment, and the bushes that grew there before those had been trained around it to thicken up and cover it just as those had done. You didn't hear me slip, as I knew afterward, in the noise the blasting made, and the bushes bent back after me again, as bushes do, so that all Weaver put together and staring at the spot couldn't have told you where I disappeared. The cave in which I found myself and through which I groped my way out, by the matches I had with me, from the chamber that was lighted by the little bricked hole in the roof over which the huckleberry bushes grew, had its other opening a mile off toward Palmerston in the swamp where there used to be a post-road years ago. The opening was in a water-drain with a round iron grate in the bank along what used to be the road, and the grate, which I found could be removed, and which left a hole big enough to pass a barrel through, was the entrance to the storehouse of those famous early smugglers who were known to have been driven from this coast, and in search of whose lair every school-boy since their time has been haunting the hills back of Palmerston, where it has always been supposed to have been. The smugglers, owing to the care of the revenue authorities, had evidently been unable to remove any of their hidden store, and had left me enough casks of King George's good old wine to buy me a very happy ending to my days. It is swathed in cobwebs that will put wonderful cobwebs into our heads! There is enough

of it stored in this cellar," he continued, "to provide for many years, I hope, for your entertainment."

The man who had stood in waiting appeared at Brown's signal with a tray of glasses filled with liquor of a rare sparkling color.

"It has been mellowing for two hundred years for this occasion," Brown said as he raised his glass. "Let us drink to renewed good fellowship, and to the health of those who made it possible for us to drink to-night!"

And so the mystery surrounding Brown dissolved in an equally amazing fact, in the house the smugglers' wine had built, and in the smugglers' wine we drank the smugglers' health; and thus it was that we made our first acquaintance with that wonderful old beverage, steeped in romance, in which I, and all of us, have since forgiven Brown.

Under the Door of the Doghole.*

BY HOLMAN DAY.

CONVICT No. 331, known in the profession as "Turk, the Welcherman," now serving the last of a four years' dose, was hungry for tobacco that forenoon. He was sewing a saddle in the prison harness shop, boring and twitching stolidly.

The two guards were humped on their high stools, their elbows on their knees, and were ruminating meditatively. Their gustful smacks were too much for Turk's appetite.

"That slab-sided new bloke ought to be lugging the remains of a plug about him somewhere," pondered No. 331, eyeing the melancholy stranger who was making harness pads, the usual task of the prison neophyte. Therefore when Turk caught the stranger's sad and indifferent eye he suggestively gnawed at his grimy thumb. The convict gave no sign that he understood, but, a moment later, making an errand to the water cooler, he stealthily slid a strip of tobacco upon Turk's bench.

"I like you better than I thought I was going to," was the awkward compliment that No. 331 hissed at the stranger as he returned to his work.

"Well, I don't like you," snarled the new man, glowering on the beaming convict. "Wish 'twould poison you."

Turk thought upon that ungracious speech, having little else to think about, and the more he thought the bitterer grew his heart. Nice way, that was, to talk to a poor convict, wasn't it? Turk began to yank his waxed ends with a more vicious twitch.

Perhaps the man was some "big job" crook who considered a mere welcherman below his circle of society. No, the stranger couldn't know anything about No. 331's particular crime. It must therefore have been a direct, personal and gratuitous insult.

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Gr-r-r! Twitch! He broke a thread and cut his palm when he yanked that time. So he made an errand to the guard to ask for court-plaster, and as he passed the convict, he ground against him surlily.

"Get out of the way, you lantern-jawed, back-porch thief," growled Turk under his breath, an eye apprehensively on the half-dozing guard. The stranger knocked a heel viciously against Turk's shin, and, yawing the corner of his mouth, shot out, like a jet of steam, a taunt that reflected severely on the nature of No. 331's pedigree.

When Turk went back to his bench he held his awl at his side as he passed the tall convict, and sunk the weapon into that person's leg as far as a vicious jab would carry it.

It was an Homeric battle while it lasted. The somnolent guards, recovering from their astonishment, fell on the combatants, and over-willing convict volunteers assisted. Hoarse bawlings roared out through the windows, and the clatter of falling benches swelled the din. The watchman in the tower rang the bell, the wall guards came running out of their little houses with their Winchesters cocked, the "trusties" at work in the yard were scuffled together in a fear-stricken huddle, and the startled whisper that ran through the adjacent broom shop and carriage factory rumored that at least one hundred convicts were making a break for liberty.

But at last the "core" of the difficulty was dragged out of the mess — two bloody, fist-brandishing men, still striving to get in another whack.

They were hunched, and hurried across the prison yard, were slammed through the big door and along the corridor, chucked down the steps leading to the doghole, thrust each into a cell, and the doors were banged and locked. A bit of light glimmered a moment under the doors, and then the big outer portal creaked and shut with a hollow "whang!" Chock-chock! the bolt was driven.

The darkness within was so profound that the air had a sooty feel between the fingers. At least, Turk thought so, as he groped about. There was a raised plank on one side, and a bucket in the corner. Nothing else in the place. Turk sat on the plank and

meditated. After a time he heard some one moving on the other side of the thick wall. He rapped. No answer. He rapped more till his skinned knuckles ached, and then he kicked. No answer. But Turk was not willing to let the quarrel drop. There could be no more fisticuffs, to be sure, but a few scathing remarks were seething in his soul. So he lay flat on his belly, put his mouth to the little crack through which he had seen the light under the door, and whispered shrilly:

"Say you — you human hyeny, what made you go to work and stir up all this trouble?"

A subdued grunting on the other side of the wall indicated that No. 331's neighbor was stooping to his own crack.

"Me?" the vehement answer came, "Me? Why, it was you! You bradded me!"

"You drove me to it," rasped Turk.

"You're a liar; and I heard one of the guards say that I climbed aboard you without any provocation." The voice of the neighbor was pitched in tones of mingled resentment and complaint.

"Well, didn't you start it by hurting my feelings?" Turk demanded.

"Feelings! Feelings! Who are you to talk about feelings being hurt? I'm the one that's been trampled on and ground into the dirt, and abused till I hate the whole tribe of men," gritted the other.

"P'raps begging a chew of tobacco is now reckoned a mortal insult outside amongst the Four Hundred," sarcastically replied No. 331, "but it wasn't considered so when I left society to come in here."

"Oh, you don't understand, you fool," blurted the stranger. "You're just a man's far as I'm concerned, and I hate all men. That's all! I don't care anything about anybody's feelings. I haven't any feelings of my own left."

"Er-r, how about that awl?" inquired Turk, blandly. There was silence. No. 331 tentatively poked the puffiness under one of his eyes, and wondered how the spot would look in the garish light of day.

"Say, you, in there," he continued at last, "they must have been doing things to you outside."

A grunt.

"What are you salted for?"

No answer.

"Well, suit yourself, hog! Here's a chance for you to relieve your feelings, but if you'd rather bottle 'em all up, why then bottle 'em and sizzle!" He got up and went and sat on his plank.

A half-hour later he heard his neighbor hissing at the door crack. Turk took up his former position.

"I don't want to be misunderstood by everybody, even convicts," the stranger said. His tone was now appealing. "Listen to me. I'm going to tell you something, for I probably won't have the chance to talk with any one again in here. I want to find out if convicts are as bad as the criminals that society allows to run loose and looks up to. Listen to me. If you're the right man, if there's one spark of honor left anywhere in you, 'twill be worth your while."

"Oh, every one knows that the biggest crooks haven't been caught yet," observed Turk, calmly.

"I'm a poor, abused man," the stranger went on. "I'm no cheap criminal. You want to understand that at the start. I got dragged in by a lying cur who thought up the whole crime. My father was a minister."

He paused in order to allow No. 331 to interject a note of wondering admiration, but no sound came.

"Yes, a good minister," the other went on. "I was brought up strict, and I was all right till I went away from home to work. Then I got against it hard, and needed money. And the doctor told me how I could get some."

"Doctor who?" inquired No. 331.

"I'm not ready to say yet. Met that doctor by happenstance in a saloon when he was down to the city to loosen up a little, so he said. He was mousing, that was what he was doing. He was looking for just such a prize package as I turned out to be. When we got sociable I invited him to my room and we smoked, and he told me about how hard a country doctor has to work, and how when he wants to rest he just has to steal away to the city and relax. Then he told me about his patients. Said he had one old man on the string who had been down on banks ever since a trust

company failed on him. He kept thirty-five thousand dollars in a chest under his bed, slept with a double-barreled gun across his feet. Lived 'way out three miles from the village. The doctor said that the old man paid cash down for each visit. Doctors, you know, are something like ministers in the country. The people trust them. The doctor had seen the old man go to his chest for money, and one day the old man owned up how much he had there.

"The doctor laughed when he told me, and said as how it was too bad to have all that money tucked into a chest under an old man's bed and doing no one any good. Old man was a bach, and had no one in the world to leave his money to except the old woman who kept house for him.

"Doc came down to the city a few months later, and said the money was still there. Say, do you know I'd been thinking about that money a whole lot? I was out of a job half the time, wore old clothes, and knew what it was to figure on free lunches, and I'd left a nice girl up country waiting for me.

"I can't remember who made the first break — but the first thing I knew the doctor and I were talking about the best way of getting that money into circulation. We came around to that point just as natural as could be. The doctor allowed that there couldn't be any murdering, of course, because we were not that kind. He pointed out to me that he was in a ticklish position, for he had access to the house, and was knowing to the old man's money. The only way he could afford to go in was by fixing up an alibi without a hole that you could stick a cambric needle through. 'You can duck in and duck out, but I've got to stay there and face the music,' he said. 'There can't be a glimmer of suspicion about me — and country people are awfully suspicious. I can get a sleeping powder into that old man that will put him on the shelf till the roosters crow. I know of a window that can be handled any time. There's nothing there to bother an able-bodied man. In the meantime I'll be arranging my alibi. I've got a patient half a mile on each side of the old man's place. I'll start from one place at eleven, pick you up on the way, divide and show up at the other patient's so soon that if the old woman ever gets time figured out in her mind they can't put me to the bad with any suspicion!'

"Well, I couldn't gainsay that, you know. The doctor was entitled to a good lay, and was certainly doing his full half, as it seemed to me. There wasn't going to be any trouble about my climbing the night train and being a hundred miles away before that old man woke.

"The thing came off as slick as the bark off a willow whistle. I got in easy enough. The old woman was too frightened to yell, and for that matter I got the gag in her mouth before she was awake. Old man dead asleep, gun across his feet. Chest easy mark for my tools. Most of the money in bank notes and gold, and not hard to carry in my sack. I out and humped down across the orchard, and hid beside the stone wall. Five minutes of eleven! On the dot a rubber-tired wagon came whirring down the road. I whistled. Team pulled up.

"'Got it?' the doctor whispered.

"'All safe,' I said.

"'Sling it in quick,' said he.

"So I tossed it and grabbed the dasher to pull myself aboard, when off he drew and poked me stiff-armed between the eyes. Then whish-whack, down came the lash on the horse, and away he flew."

"Well, I donno as I blame you for feeling somewhat vexed with human nature in general," commented Turk, sloofing up the mouth moisture that the thoughts of thirty-five thousand dollars started flowing.

"Hold on," choked the stranger; "that's only a part of it. I got up and stood looking after him out of one eye. Other eye bunged tight. There was a house quarter of a mile further on. 'Twas the patient's he had told me about. Before he got to it I heard him shouting:

"'Ho, turn out! Highwaymen!'

"And then lights began to wink and men to bawl. As for me, I picked up my heels and took to the woods.

"They caught me in less than an hour. Of course they did. I had no start, and the dogs picked up my track. And as soon as I was lodged in the village lock-up the doctor came bustling in through the gang at the door.

"'That's the man,' he blarted, sticking out his finger at me before I could open my mouth. 'As I have been saying,' he went

on, 'he stood at the side of the road while I was hurrying from Jackson's to Perry's, and I thought it was some one who had been sent from up the cross-road. The neighborhood up there knows I've been coming out to Jackson's every night. Well, of course I pulled up when he spoke. He made a grab, and tried to yank me out of the wagon. But he was up against this!' He shook his fist, and the crowd laughed and hollered:

"'Good boy, Doc!'

"'You can give 'em a point or two!'

"'Gaze on the tint on that feller's eye!'—and such slush.

"'Say, look-a-here, good people,' I started, 'I see it's about time for me to tell my little story.'

"But before I had time to say a word more a man came banging up outside and yelled:

"'Cyrus Brann has been robbed of all his money! Ev'rybody out to chase the critters!'

"The air was full of 'whens' and 'wheres' for a little while, and then every one allowed that it was a sure thing that the old fool would be robbed some time. And then all at once that magnificent specimen of scenery called bluff—that doctor—butted in with the first instalment of the alibi that he had talked about so much when we were arranging the thing.

"'Why, friends,' he hollered, smacking his fists together, 'it's all plain now. Here is the robber, and he wanted my team to get away in. Why, it's all clear!'

"'Sure thing!' yelled every one.

"They had only patted me over before to find my weapons. Now they went through my pockets like rats through a buttery. I'd found a little packet of old-fashioned scrip when I was stuffing my sack and I'd sunk that for my own use. I'm sort of a crank on old-style money."

"Any kind is my fad, so long as it isn't bad," said Turk.

"Well, that money put me to the bad when they found it," said the stranger, wafting a sigh under the door. "Every one knew that old Brann had scrip that he had saved for years. But the thing that jarred me most was to catch that doctor looking at me with a grieved expression as though he had detected me stealing from him. Then the crowd theorized that I had hidden the

rest of the money or that an accomplice had got away with it. They figured that an accomplice would be holding the money while I made a try for the team. And was I overhauled and talked to and threatened and brow-beaten and sworn at and bread-and-watered and sweat-boxed and coaxed and promised? Why, you poor setter pup, what right have you got to talk to me about your having feelings and being abused?"

"'Twasn't encouraging to honesty, that's a fact — for I reckon you told 'em all about the doctor," Turk observed. "Leastways, you wouldn't be human if you didn't."

"Told 'em!" panted the convict. "Told 'em? Told 'em! Why, I told 'em in words — I whistled it — I sung it — I wrote it. And believe me? It has only made me the laughing stock of this whole State."

"Don't s'pose you could spin a thread against the doctor's alibi, could you?" asked No. 331 with interest.

"Why, he'd buzzed along like a whirlwind from one patient to the other house, where he hollered for help, and I, just as though I was afraid he wouldn't make good enough time, stood there half way between those houses and chucked aboard thirty-five thousand dollars. Oh, I was a good, accommodating jackass all right! Did he have an alibi? Well, what do you think?"

"Speaking as a harness maker," said Turk, "I should say that alibi was double-stitched and silver trimmed."

"Of course every one then said I made up the ridiculous story about the poor doctor so as to help my accomplice off, or else to make people believe the money wasn't hidden up there in the woods. I hear they've dug that territory over at least three times, cut down every hollow tree, and are starting in to do it all over again. And here I've told 'em and told 'em and taken my God to witness and screamed it at 'em where that money is, and they only soak me more for what they call my obstinacy."

"Discouraging, certainly," admitted Turk.

"Discouraging? Why, it's enough to madden a man. I am pretty near crazy. I was crazy to pitch into you in the shop. It's crazy business telling you all this about that doctor, but I can't help talking to somebody. Guess you don't believe it, though! I don't care. I'm hardened."

"Oh, I take lots of stock in doghole confidences, myself," said Turk. "The real truth sounds different in here than it does outside. Even a judge can't squat out his prejudices and get next in a case like this. By the way, what vacation did he give you?"

"Twenty years," said the man, mournfully. "The judge made the sentence stout on account of my wilful persistence in sticking to a lie and slandering a leading citizen. Think of that!"

"Tough, certainly tough!" said Turk, sympathetically.

"I'll get four years off for good behavior, won't I?"

"Well, you hain't starting in just right to get many merit marks," drily said No. 331. "But you can practice after this on improving your temper."

"Sixteen years!" mused the man. "And I shall spend the whole sixteen planning the death that that miserable, lying traitor shall die. Oh, it will be a sweet death, now I can tell you!"

"I wouldn't plan too much on things like that," counselled Turk. "Lots of things can happen in sixteen years."

"The devils in hell who love a merry vengeance will not allow anything to take that man from my clutches," rasped the other, then added plaintively, "If you're a short-term man you'll respect the confidences of this doghole. There ought to be honor among convicts, just because there isn't any between men in the outside world. Is there such a thing as honor among thieves? I'm not a natural thief, and I don't know."

"Meaning I am, I suppose?" growled No. 331 in deep tones.

"Don't get mad. I have a reason." This appealingly.

A long silence.

"I can wait patiently till the time comes to kill that man," said the convict at last. "No one else can do that job to suit me. But there is one other thing."

More silence.

"I hate to know that he's out there enjoying himself with that money!" The man snarled the words.

"I reckon he won't be spending much of that money yet awhile," said Turk, musingly. "He won't dare to."

"That's just what I've thought," cried the man eagerly; "and he'll have it hid somewhere in a bunch. He won't dare to bank it. What I want to know is, will you steal it? It can be done.

Get your crowd, capture him, and roast his feet till he squeals. The tip I've given you is worth one share. Prove there's honor among convicts and put it away for me."

"I'll tell you what I'll do for you," said Turk, in a burst of generosity. "You see I'm knowing to the fact that Doc Tudbury has had this Brann matter on his mind for some time."

"I haven't told you his name," snapped the convict.

"Yes, he talked it over with me once," Turk went on, calmly.

"Why — why didn't you say something about that while I was telling you?" gasped the stranger.

"It's impolite to break in on another man's story," replied No. 331 blandly, "and you know you're a bit fussy today, and the Doc being my brother ——"

"What-t-t-t?"

"Yes," drawled Turk, "a brother of mine. I've been tremendously interested in what you've been telling me. I tried to poke Doc up to that job half a dozen years ago, but he had foolish notions those days. Glad to hear he's given them up. I was afraid one time he'd never be anything but a common doctor running his legs off at a dollar a visit." No. 331's tone expressed both pride and gratification.

His neighbor uttered ejaculations that Turk checked soothingly.

"Now don't get to losing your temper again, old man. Losing your temper in State prison sets you back just so much. Study to improve your disposition, say I!"

"You sneaking ——"

"Tut, tut, man, I'm astonished to hear you go on in that fashion. Don't you see I'm going to do a chore for you? I'll be going out four months from now. I'll go right to the Doc and say, 'Whack up, old boy!' He'll whack up. No bluff goes. There I rip half of that pile right out of him. Hurt his feelings? Well, I guess! What do you want to bother your own head about vengeance for? Be calm, be patient, and sixteen years from now, if you're good, Doc and I will put up another job that will square you."

"I'll call the warden," clamored the prisoner, "and I'll tell him all this, how you're that doctor's brother, and what you're planning on."

"Oh, if you're going to be nasty and make a family affair of this," retorted Turk, "I'll get in my whack first and say you told me a cousin of yours got away with the swag, and that you went to work and made up this new story as soon as you found out I am the brother of the man you tried to ruin. See? Why, you're on the run. You haven't any alibi. The Doc has. You can't go up against that. You're all in, man. Now a good alibi ——"

But at that moment the big outer door was thrown open, and the voice of the deputy warden was heard shouting a command from his platform.

"Bring out No. 331 in the right hand cell!"

"It's the other man who picked the fight. Three days in the hole and bread and water for him," mumbled the guard, rattling his key in the door.

Clunk-clank! And Turk stumbled out blinkingly. The guard cocked a listening ear. Fists were thunking at the other iron door, feet rapped dully against the thick stones, a muffled voice roared hoarse yawls of rage, shifting to appeals for the warden.

"That's a wild Injun in there all right," observed the guard to his mate. They listened again thoughtfully.

"Excuse me, gents," ventured No. 331, "but he's been raging and raving bad for some time."

"He must be a lunatic or he wouldn't have lighted on an inoffensive prisoner the way he did in the shop," said the guard, and he slammed the big door. "We'll give him the hose in a minute."

Turk joined the line of convicts marching to dinner, took his tin of meat stew at the cook room wicket, and retired to his cell.

"It's nice to know," he mused, "that your folks are doing well, and to know it first hand. 'Alibi!' Doc'll bark at me, up boo-woo! all so bold the first time I mention the matter. I look at him from left eye. 'Alibi!' he'll say fainter. I look at him out of right eye. 'Alibi!' he'll say real faint. Then I give him the full wide-open from both eyes. And he'll swear a little while, and then go get the money. He won't cheat his poor brother!"

A Frontier Rivalry.*

BY JOHN CAIN.

BLUEFIELD'S first citizen had arrived. Standing on the grass-covered townsite near the spot where later the Grand Hotel proudly reared its high board front, he admiringly surveyed its undulating beauty.

Building material formed the most conspicuous portion of his outfit, which was now to be unloaded. It was not of a character to warrant hope of ornate architecture. The lumber was of common grade, and there were black rolls diffusing a pungent smell that prairie animals with nostrils expert in odors of the plain had sniffed from afar and wondered at. These rolls were of tar-paper for outside finishing, which, however much it may have offended the esthetic eye or the sensitive nose, won the devotion of early settlers for its prized virtues of lightness and economy. But though the structural supply was a modest one, its owner felt a radiant satisfaction in its possession. For was not the first building of Bluefield to be fashioned from it! And was not Bluefield to be the pet town of the Chicago & Western and the Milwaukee & St. Peter, which companies, except in matters affecting Bluefield, were soon to fight a duel with steel for supremacy in the new Northwest!

But the base upon which young Ashton's enterprise was to rest was a box wherein was a machine, small but potential in giving civilization a start. It was an "army" printing press, the simplest contrivance for the diffusion of printed intelligence. The owner had held the reins on the wagon carrying the printing plant and the commissariat. To hired drivers having no proprietary interest in the project might be committed the task of guiding the other freight. But the man who was not only to be Bluefield's first edi-

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* The writer of this story received a cash prize of $150 in THE BLACK CAT story contest ending October 12, 1904.

tor, but its first inhabitant as well, justly occupied the place of honor in the driving.

And yet Ashton's display of pride in his plant did not have complete inward justification. He had hoped to buy a hand-press. But his capital was not sufficient — the expense of getting established being so indefinite — to justify paying for one. And who would give credit to a man proposing to start a newspaper in an almost uninhabited country? So the hand-press ambition had been put aside.

When the wagons had reached the site yet without a structure to distinguish it from the rest of the sweeping plain, the "army" surely seemed large enough for the field. Ashton felt that it would do for the present. But being a pioneer he had faith in the future, and out of his faith came a vision in which he saw, not an "army" machine, nor yet a hand-press, but that glorious possession, a cylinder press run by steam.

A shout by one of his drivers directed his attention to a forerunner of the multitude which would make this vision a reality. There was an object far off to the east, where the ground rose higher.

"It's an outfit," called Joe.

An outfit! A thing to thrill the young pioneer! Bringing other people into his new world — people with hope and faith like his!

"Somebody else's just fool enough to want to locate in this infernal country," was Joe's guess.

Joe Weeks was a freighter when he worked, and regarded raw prairie as fit only to be teamed across. His sarcasm missed its mark. The editor was already planning to give whoever was in the schooner a send-off in the first issue of his paper. He rightly assumed that this vessel of immigration was being steered to the haven of Bluefield.

Frequently he turned from the work of unloading to watch with much satisfaction the approaching schooner navigating the prairie main. When it came near he had been on the ground several hours and had a consciousness of being at home, which imposed a frontier obligation to extend to newcomers an effusive welcome.

"It's probably a stock of groceries," he remarked to Weeks.

"That's what a town really needs at the start. If it is, it ought to be good for a half-column ad. in the *Pioneer*."

Ashton walked toward the craft in a cordial spirit. The schooner hove to and a young fellow disembarked.

"Howdy. This is Bluefield, I suppose," exclaimed the newcomer, jauntily taking the initiative.

Ashton had seen within the canvas a young woman, who, being so entirely unexpected a person, was responsible for his failure to promptly perform his semi-official duty. "Yes, this is the coming city," he responded, striving to recover his balance.

"Well, we've come to stay," said the other. "My name's McCargar, Jim McCargar, and this is my sister," nodding toward the young woman. "It's a little raw, I know, for a woman here now, but she's a good compositor and I brought her along."

'Compositor!" exclaimed Ashton.

"Yes. You know what a compositor is? She sets type," explained McCargar. "I'm going to start a newspaper here."

"A newspaper!" The object Ashton had seen on the horizon was a cloud, and it had now covered his sky! "But you mustn't do that. I've come here to start one myself." Ashton grasped at a claim of exclusive right by reason of priority.

"Oh, yes, I must," said McCargar, also striving against the force of bad news. "I'm here, and you've got to make room for me. We're getting a little thick, I admit, for the size of the town," he added, with an effort at facetiousness, "but she's going to grow."

"What kind of a press have you?" asked Ashton, wishing to know the worst.

"Only an eight-column hand-press," replied McCargar, airily. "It'll do for a while until business picks up. What's yours?"

"I brought in an army," said Ashton in a tone implying that it was a matter of choice. "When I get the field sized up I'll decide whether to get a large hand-press or a cylinder."

McCargar smiled incredulously. "Well, we're hungry," he said abruptly, "and if you'll let us start a fire in your town we'll fix up something to eat. Here's my pasteboard," he added, handing his competitor a card.

As Ashton turned to go, McCargar's sister was leaning forward at the front of the wagon, her hand upon a hoop of the over-arching

canvas, and a most objectionable suggestion of sympathy in her eyes. On his way Ashton glanced at the card he still held in his hand. Amazed, he stopped, staring wide-eyed at it, then turned as if to go back, but changed his mind, and still looking at the bit of cardboard, strode on. He had read: "James G. McCargar, editor and proprietor of the Bluefield Pioneer."

Fierce resentment burned its way through Ashton's being. He would insist upon having for his paper, alone, the title of "Pioneer!" What right, anyway, had this interloper to come to Bluefield? There were other townsites not yet pre-empted where McCargar could go. Here, where there was no local government, no law, the primitive policy of force seemed to him righteous, and he was sure he could drive his slender rival forth.

But his fever soon ran its course, and in a saner state he saw the absurdity of the scheme of violence. Besides, there was the fellow's sister. He hated her, too, of course, but being a woman she was entitled, especially on the frontier, to respectful treatment. And furthermore, he was conscious of a feeling, which was doubtless inspired by his strong public spirit, that her presence might have a gracious influence in starting the young city aright.

Ashton had wavered, to be sure, in choosing between *Vidette* and *Pioneer,* and the choice had at last been made by means of a toss-up, but now he would have nothing but the name that had been decreed by that agency of Fate. Even if he had been willing to change the title it would have been a matter of weeks to get a new "head" from the type foundry. It was, for all reasons, out of the question. He would rush his type-setting and fortify his prior right by getting out his paper ahead.

Six days later Ashton's journal came from the press. It was not much of a paper compared with issues he has put out since, but it is highly improbable that he has ever thought as much of even his celebrated twenty-page special edition, illustrated, as he did of this little number. It chronicled at length the arrival of a stock of merchandise, the starting of a blacksmith shop, and the coming of a crew of carpenters to erect a hotel. It made very brief mention of a saloon outfit, the owners of which, he noticed, had been greeted in a most friendly manner by McCargar, which incident placed Ashton more firmly on the side of temperance. Most

space was, however, given to prophetic statements concerning the coming greatness of Bluefield, with some fervid words about the devotion of the editor to its best interests.

It had been reported to Ashton that his rival had been overheard in a conversation with his sister cursing the country, its winds and its water, and pronouncing it unfit as a place of habitation for anyone not having the willingness of an Indian to endure nature at its worst. This news caused Ashton to put his item about the McCargars in this form:

"James G. McCargar and his sister, Miss Mary McCargar, are here from Yankton. Mr. McCargar is looking the town over with a view to starting a newspaper, but as he is not pleased with the country, and finds the field already occupied, he may decide not to locate here. If he concludes to seek further, we fraternally wish him good luck in finding a location to his liking."

This brotherly statement was regarded by Mr. McCargar as offensive, and when his paper appeared, it contained this reply:

"A wandering printer, whose name in this country is Ashton, blew in here the other day with a box of old type and a second-hand toy press, and has started what he calls a newspaper. In this sheet, which we would not take any notice of, except for the fact that it may become a disgrace to the town, the fellow attempts to be funny with us, intimating that we do not like the country, and are ready to quit. Our faith in the country was shown when we brought in our complete printing outfit, and we can truly say that we have never liked any place we ever lived in more than we have the city of Bluefield during the seven weeks we have been here. And we have a right to feel that this is where we belong, judging from the many words of appreciation we have received from the day of our first publication, and the liberal patronage that has flowed in on us. We are here to stick, as this nomad will discover. With a fine plant, and backed by ample capital with which to enlarge it when necessary, we are prepared to keep right on publishing such a paper as Bluefield deserves."

When Ashton read this fulmination his anger reached the degree that inspires violence. "The colossal liar!" he exclaimed, as there in the date line he saw the whole scheme to beat him by claim of prior publication revealed in: "Vol. 1. No. VI."

The fellow's insults demanded that he be choked into an admission of his depravity. Ashton was at once striding toward McCargar's tent. The personal thrusts alone might have started him on the way to vengeance, but it was the injustice of the contemptuous allusions to his entirely new plant that really enraged him. He would see that the shameful disparagement of his facilities was stopped. But when McCargar's sister met him at the door of the tent and told him that her brother was ill, he awkwardly tried to make her understand that he was merely passing that way, and even failed to decline a sprig of goldenrod she offered him from a bunch she had gathered on the prairie. As he walked away, he reflected at length upon the subject of the great difference there could be between members of the same family. Such cogitation led him to decide to bear himself in the controversy in a dignified manner, and in the next issue of his paper he dealt with his rival in a properly disdainful way.

Bluefield grew rapidly. The track of the Chicago & Western soon reached it on its way West, and then came daily trainloads of people looking for business or professional openings, or most of all, quarter-sections of free government land. The blue-joint grass which gave the town its name was trampled down all over the site by buyers of lots. The tough sod which had never before been disturbed by human kind was ruthlessly cut for excavations over which were raised structures which were later regarded as small and unsightly, but were now looked upon as altogether admirable works of the builder. With hammer and saw men were hurriedly striving to make the place worthy in its infancy of its great destiny. To the hundreds of enthusiasts who were founding a city, the strife of the newspapers was but an incident. They easily distinguished the papers as Ashton's *Pioneer* and McCargar's *Pioneer,* and any objection that may have been felt because of the titulary sameness was soon waived. But it remained a very serious matter to the editors, and rivalry for the growing patronage of the community intensified the bitterness.

The need of local government being felt at Bluefield from the beginning, steps were soon taken to organize the county in which it was situated. Bluefield was, of course, made the temporary county seat, and the matter of making it the permanent one at the

first election was regarded as a mere formality, until the promoters of a townsite ten miles away attracted contemptuous notice by announcing their intention to compete. But Bluefield presently realized that it would be necessary to conduct a campaign. The presumptuous managers of Oakton's candidacy had begun work among the voters, and strangely enough, were convincing some of them.

Committees were quickly formed to guard Bluefield's interests, and the work that followed gave McCargar opportunities for gaining prominence, of which he took ample advantage. So clever did he seem to be that in addition to other honors he was given the chairmanship of the important committee to keep advised of the movements of the enemy.

One evening Ashton sat on his office doorstep. He would have been utterly dejected over the eminence his rival was maintaining, except for the odd reason that he had that afternoon heard that the rival's sister had spoken appreciatively of him. The kind words that had been repeated to him were the first positive evidence that she did not believe it her sisterly duty to hate him. He was pleased now that he had put that sprig of goldenrod away somewhere, and he would try to remember where. As his thoughts were hurrying into a rather attractive field, they were checked by the arrival of Chairman Stackpole of the county seat executive committee.

"We've got important work for you, Ashton." Mr. Stackpole spoke with an intensity befitting a serious matter. "Those Danes up the river must be kept in line. They have been friendly to us, you know, but McCargar is on to a scheme of the Oakton people to win them over. There must be all of sixty votes there, and you know how clannish Danes are. If the Oakton notion got around among them they might swing over in a body. McCargar wanted this work. But he figured it would take several hundred dollars and we can't afford that much. He'll be more disgruntled when he finds we've given you the job. But in this fight we can't let people's feelings interfere, and we know the leaders of the Danes like you for the way you've mentioned them in your paper. So there's the proposition, and of course you'll tackle it?"

Ashton was already planning his campaign. In his elated state he could already see how proud he would be when the returns came

in, showing the Danish vote solid for Bluefield. But he controlled himself sufficiently to say in a calm tone: "I'll do the best I can."

"Well, if you do that, we'll feel safe there," an expression of confidence Ashton resolved to sustain.

But he was not so sure of success after a week of electioneering. Oakton emissaries had been making alluring talks, and the colonists were showing an annoying disposition to consider the matter. "Ay tank Ay tank 'bote et," was too often the aggravating reply to Ashton's best arguments.

Ashton soon saw a chance for a master-stroke. The Jim river, which runs through the district occupied by these settlers, was without good fording places there. This was having some influence on the county seat question, as the colonists on the east side of the river had to cross it in going to Bluefield, whereas they could go to Oakton without that thrilling experience. While listening to the maledictions of a worthy east-side citizen stuck in midstream with a pair of mules, it occurred to Ashton that it would be wise for Bluefield to build a bridge. No massive structure was required, but one could be built cheaply that would hold the Danish gratitude until election day. But the executive committee did not approve the project. Any bridge that would serve the purpose would be too expensive. And besides, if it enabled Eastsiders to come more conveniently to Bluefield, the west-side settlers could go more easily to Oakton. No, the best plan was to assure the Danes that as soon as the county was organized, Bluefield would see that a fine public bridge was built for them.

But when Ashton a few days later reported that Oakton proposed to build a bridge for the settlement, the Bluefield committee found it could spare the money, and gave a hurry order for timber. And that was how it happened that two bridges were built at the bend near Cottonwood gulch.

Ashton's confidence was greatly strengthened in the succeeding days. A week before the election he knew how every man felt on the momentous question. His report was that the sentiment was entirely favorable to Bluefield. This greatly encouraged the committee. Oakton had conducted a despicable campaign, and the result would be close. It was possible that the Danish vote would decide the contest.

In the general satisfaction over Ashton's good work, McCargar did not share. Since the refusal to give him the Danish assignment and the sum for expenses he had demanded, his interest in the campaign had suffered a decline. Nevertheless, he had been diligent in the work of keeping close to the enemy. Now, at the end of the campaign, he was busy getting out the issue of his paper which was to appear the day before the election. It was being filled with Bluefield arguments, to be distributed widely among the voters. The night before the day of publication the press work was to be done. When McCargar entered his office to do this printing he locked the door. A form of type stood on the imposing stone, all made up except a portion of a column reserved for a final article. The copy of this article he now gave his sister, with an injunction to hurry it up. As she stepped to a case of type to set it she saw that it was about the Danish vote. Disregarding his desire for haste, she read it through. Then she turned angrily upon him. He had been watching her.

"You are not going to print this!" she exclaimed.

"I just am. Why not?"

"Because it is an insult to those Danes, and will drive them all to voting for Oakton. It'll make Oakton the county seat."

"Well, what if it does — it's nothing to me."

"Nothing to you!" cried the amazed girl. "Why, it'll ruin our paper and kill you in the town. That's what it will do to you."

"See here, you. I know what I'm doing. These fellows haven't done the square thing. They think Ashton's pretty smart, but I'll show them they don't know what smartness is. I want this thing set up as fast as you know how. An Oakton man is coming here tonight, and I want papers ready for him to take out."

"I'll not set it," said the girl.

"You've got to set it. You talk about me ruining myself," he went on, "but if you don't help me get the paper out with this in it, you'll do the ruining."

The awful conviction forced itself upon her that he was in a plot to betray his town.

"I'll not set a word of it," was her ultimatum.

"Well, sit down there and keep quiet," he commanded, and commenced the slow task of setting the article himself.

The girl sat in a limp state, hopeless of thwarting the scheme, which was now very plain. Papers containing the offensive article would be distributed among the Danes in the last hours of the campaign, and the damage would be done so late that Bluefield would not be able to repair it. But how could she prevent it? How save her brother from disgrace and her town from defeat? She could think of no plan. No, there was nothing she could do. What! Could she do that? The limp figure straightened up and became rigid. She could try. It was a rather desperate thing to attempt, but she could try. It was not fair, maybe, but there was the old justification of the importance of the end. She looked over at her brother. He was awkwardly picking up the type.

"Oh, well," she called, "if you insist, I'll set the stuff up!"

"Now you're showing some sense," he responded, and gladly turned over to her the composing stick. She was an expert type-setter, and soon the article was up. This is a copy of it:

LET THE DANES GO.

BLUEFIELD DOESN'T NEED THE HELP OF THE PURCHASABLE CROWD.

One of the things Bluefield has learned in the county seat fight is that the Danish colonists are absolutely unreliable. They have been playing both sides to see where they could drive the best bargain. Some have obtained money from both towns for "campaign expenses," and all the others have wanted it. We never knew of a more SHAMELESS ATTEMPT TO MARKET VOTES, and it makes our blood boil when we think that Bluefield has subjected itself to the humiliation of asking the support of such a crowd. We understand that Ashton of the opposition sheet boasts that he has them all bought by fixing some of the leaders, but we are convinced that this town will not get the votes except by paying each voter his price, and even then it is not certain that they will vote right. Is it not a shame that such people were ever given the ballot? We know that our executive committee despises this corrupt gang as we do, and therefore we make bold to say that we are in favor of spurning the whole lot and depending upon the honest vote of the county. DO NOT PAY THE LEECHES ANOTHER CENT, is our advice to the committee, and LET THE DANES GO, if they want to. We can win without their vile assistance.

When the article was ready, McCargar became confidential. "I hope you can see this thing as I do," he ventured. She said nothing. "This is the only way Oakton can reach the Danish vote. The fellows who are backing it have plenty of money, but it wouldn't work with the Danes. The trouble with them is that they are too all-fired conscientious. Of course, it seems strange to you that I should help Oakton. But Bluefield hasn't been fair

with me, and you know I don't like the layout anyway. I have merely sold Oakton advertising space, but you can bet it pays me a big price for the space. I know I can't live here after this is discovered, and so I got enough cash," he went on shamelessly, "to make it an object to get out of the country, and I'm going. I am to have $300 more if Oakton wins, and you can get that and apply it on what I owe you. The plant is yours, of course, and you can probably sell it. Then I'll have you come where I locate."

She did not reproach him. She had listened to his recital with rising indignation, and now so bitter was her feeling that she dared not speak. But it made the deed she had resolved on easier to perform.

He placed the article in the form and tightened the type in its steel frame. The heavy page was raised, and McCargar and his sister carried it to the press. Here it was rested on its edge before being lowered to the flat surface of the bed. The editor had a weak arm, and needed assistance in putting forms down on the press. Now, as they were steadily lowering the page, the girl's foot seemed to slip, she fell heavily against her brother, weakening his hold and losing her own, and the type fell with a crash! The metal letters, thousands of them, were jarred from their alignment into confused heaps of "pi," and it would require days to assort them. McCargar's *Pioneer* would not be issued before election!

"It's all gone to h—!" cried McCargar as he gazed at the wrecked page, while his collapsed sister lay at his feet on the floor.

"What infernal thing happened to you?" he demanded.

She pointed with shaking finger to an oily spot where she had stood. As she thus mutely answered they heard three light knocks on the rear door.

"That's Ferguson," he whispered. "He's after the papers for Oakton. I can't meet him. I'm going out the front way. Here, get up quick so I can tell you what to do. Do you hear me? I've got a horse all ready and I'm going to skip on him. Throw Ferguson off by telling him I've gone to Oakton. Tell him I've gone by the upper road. Don't let him in. I'll write you what to do."

The knocks were repeated.

"I'm off, Mary. Tell him what I've told you to say."

He stepped to the front door noiselessly and went out.

Again there was knocking on the rear door. This time it was more forcible. The young woman, rising, called out: "Who's there?"

"I want to speak to McCargar," was the reply.

"He's not here."

"Oh, yes, he is. Say, McCargar, let me in. It's Ferguson."

"My brother has gone, Mr. Ferguson. He told me to tell you he had gone to Oakton by the upper road."

Ferguson swore.

"How long has he been gone?"

"Only a little while."

"Did he take the papers with him?"

"I didn't see him when he started."

The Oakton emissary hurried away.

The next day when Ashton heard of the disaster at McCargar's he went right over to offer the use of his material. He found there, leaning over the confused heaps of type, a disconsolate figure. Only a very hard heart could remain unmoved by so pitiful a scene, and Ashton's that morning was by no means stony. What occurred there is gathered sufficiently from what appeared in the next issue of Ashton's *Pioneer*. This was mainly devoted to election returns, and accounts of the celebration of Bluefield's victory. The returns showed that the Danish colony gave Bluefield 52 majority, and as its majority in the county was but the narrow one of 35, it can be seen that but for the Danish vote it would have been defeated by 17, which fact, aided by a certain comparison, made Ashton a hero in the community.

But other decidedly interesting news appeared under the head of "Consolidation," in an article which announced that the *Pioneers* had been combined by the owners, Edward Ashton and Mary McCargar. A month later the firm of Ashton & McCargar formed another union. The ceremony would have been performed sooner, it is understood, but for the natural desire of the bride to appear on the occasion dressed to conform to the advancing requirements of society at the county seat.

Moonshine Sim.*

BY GEORGE W. SUMMERS.

"WE, the jury in the case of the United States against Sim Bailey, do find the defendant guilty as charged in the indictment."

Such was the verdict of the jury, and Sim Bailey, the moonshiner, stood up, in obedience to the order of the court, to receive his sentence.

He was a handsome specimen of the West Virginia mountaineer. Six feet and one inch he towered in the air, and his figure was as straight as the barrel of the rifle which the officers had taken from him when he was arrested. His face was covered with a stubby, reddish beard, which struggled in vain to hide the strong and regular features of his countenance, while from below the unkempt hair, which hung low on his forehead, there gleamed as keen a pair of bright blue eyes as ever gazed upon the Alleghany mountains. His clothing was crude and primitive. It gave forth odors of fried bacon fumes, wood smoke, and new-plowed ground. He wore no collar, coat or vest, and his shirt and trousers lacked distinctive coloring, suggestive more of something faded than of any special color. He was only an ignorant, uncouth mountaineer, but his gaze was steady, and he did not quail before the court as he arose, with a kind of awkward dignity, to receive his sentence for having made corn whiskey in violation of the laws of the United States.

Not far away from the prisoner's box sat Bill Duncan, who had been his chief accuser. As far as dress went, Sim and Bill looked much alike. But there all similarity ceased. Bill's shoulders stooped, his narrow forehead sloped abruptly backward at the top, his eyes moved restlessly from place to place, though he gazed most of the time upon the floor. His hands moved nervously, and

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all the time he seemed to have a frightened look. A faint trace of a smile came over his face, and his dull eyes lighted up a little as the foreman read the verdict of the jury, but he gave no other sign of emotion, and almost instantly relapsed into his former listlessness again.

Bill Duncan was Sim Bailey's neighbor. They lived not half a mile apart up near the head of Raccoon Run, in one of the wildest mountain regions in the State. In many miles they had no other neighbors. They lived alone, Sim in a small house by himself, Bill with his wife, and each one tilled a little plot of ground. Each owned his home, for it was built with his own hands, of logs, but neither owned the land he tilled, and neither knew whose it was, for the ownership of the immense tract of several thousand acres of which Sim's home and Bill's each formed a part, was a question which had not yet been decided by the courts. There were several claimants, all paying taxes on the land to keep their titles good, and a little matter of a few acres being under cultivation was of no consequence to them. So Sim and Bill had lived there peaceably for many years. No tax collector ever bothered them, for some one else paid taxes on the land. They raised their own corn and beans, killed their own hogs and cured their own bacon, raised all the tobacco they could chew and smoke, and were content. Once in a while Sim would hitch up his old horse and drive down to the store, about ten miles away. A little game, a few eggs, and perhaps some corn, would be exchanged for a few yards of hickory shirting or a piece of jeans, enough to make a pair of trousers from. On court days Sim would visit the county seat, and sundry jugs and bottles formed a part of his load as he drove toward the little town. He lived far from the county road, and strangers never passed his way, but every Sunday visitors from all parts of the county would pass Bill Duncan's door and ride up to Bailey's little cabin. None ever stopped to visit Bill, though sometimes they would speak to him as they went by.

It began to be whispered about that Sim was making moonshine whiskey. Bill Duncan knew that the government offers reward to informers who locate illicit stills and lead the officers to them, and, having from Sim's lips sufficient evidence, he set about to convict his neighbor and bring himself the reward.

And now Sim stood convicted. He was about to receive his sentence, after which Bill Duncan would receive his reward. But Bill was not as happy as he thought he would be. He tried to look at Sim, but could not raise his eyes. They wandered aimlessly across the floor, seeing nothing, while a strange sensation came over him, and he wished he were at home.

"Sim Bailey," said the court, "Have you anything to say why the sentence of the court should not be pronounced upon you?"

"I don't know's I have, Jedge," said Sim, "leastwise as to why you shouldn't sentence me. But they's a few things I would like to say so's to git 'em off'n my mind, if you don't keer."

"You may proceed," said the court.

"Well, first," and Sim stretched himself to his full height and gazed at his accuser, "I want Bill Duncan to square himself around here and look me in the eye."

There was a dramatic pause. Sim stood firm and erect, and every eye was turned upon Bill Duncan, who fidgeted nervously in his seat and looked in every direction except toward Sim. Once he attempted to raise his eyes to look at Sim, but he could not meet the firm, fixed gaze of the man he had convicted, and he dropped them quickly to the floor again.

Sim turned toward the court. "You see, Jedge, he can't do it," said he, "and I couldn't neither, if I was in his place. You know, Jedge, me and Bill lives neighbors up on Raccoon. I live nigh up to the head of the holler, and Bill he lives about half a mile furder down. They ain't nobody else as lives nigh either one of us, but Bill is sort o' curious like and a little hard to get along with, so we hain't neighbored much. But when I go apast his house I most ginerally stops to see how him an' his ole woman is gittin' along.

"Hit was jest after I had got my corn crap cut 't I drapped in one day afore sundown to see how Bill an' his ole woman was a-comin' on. I tried to holler 'em up, but couldn't raise nobody, only the dog. Then I went in and opened the door, and thar laid Bill an' his ole woman, both flat o' their backs in bed.

"'What's the matter, Bill?' says I.

"'I reckon I've about come to the end of my rope,' says Bill, sort o' feeble like, and then he rolled over and groaned.

"'Well, you do look pretty poorly, you an' the ole woman too, but you hain't nowheres near the end of your rope yit,' says I.

"Hit didn't take me long to find out as how Bill an' his ole woman both had the fever. An' you know, Jedge, when you got the fever you got to have somebody to look after you and give you physic. So I drawed some water out o' the well and fetched a gourd full and set it by the bed so's't they could help theirselves an' then I started down t' the store to git some physic. Hit's a right smart piece down t' the store, an' fore I got back hit was comin' on night. But I given 'em both some of the physic, an' then I 'lowed I'd git 'em a bite to eat, becase I knowed they hadn't had nothin' to eat for two or three days. But, Jedge, when I started to git a bite fur 'em, they wasn't a cup o' meal in the house or a slice o' bacon. They wasn't nothin' in the house to eat at all, an' I began to think as how 't maybe it wasn't fever so much as it was hunger 't was the matter with Bill. I was pretty hungry myself by that time, so I went on up to my house, and got out some meal and made some bread an' I fried some bacon an' taken it down to Bill an' his ole woman. You never seen nobody eat like they did. I don't believe they'd had a bite fur a week. After that they dozed off asleep an' I 'lowed 't maybe agin' mornin' they'd be feelin' pretty peart like.

"But the fever come on 'em agin' an' thar they laid, helpless as kittens. They couldn't do nothin' fur theirselves, and they wasn't nobody to do nothin' fur 'em, so I stayed right thar as much as I could and taken care of 'em. 'Peared like as 't they didn't have no appetite fur bacon, so I went out wunst with my rifle and killed a mess of squirrels. That seemed to brace 'em up a bit, an' so I got another mess fur 'em.

"The physic given out wunst or twicet, an' I had to go down to the store for more. When I come back, one day, with physic, Bill 'lowed I hadn't orter done that, because he never could pay fur all that physic he'd drunk up — him an' the ole woman — an' it hadn't done 'em no good no how. But I told Bill he could rest easy on that pint. I had a leetle money 't I didn't have no use fur, an' if the physic pulled him out all right, I'd jes' as lief spend it that way as any other.

"Bill wanted to know how I come to have money up thar in

the mountings whar thar wasn't never no money spent. 'Sold eggs an' bought it,' says I to him. Becase, you know, Jedge, I didn't think it was none of his business if I did sell a little licker now an' then.

"One day, after Bill an' his ole woman had begun to mend a little, Bill says to me, 'Sim, I reckon me an' the ole woman had a pretty close call,' says he.

"Well, you was pretty bad part o' the time,' says I, 'but you're a-mendin' now.'

"'''Pears like its mighty slow mendin', though,' says he. 'You know, Sim, I feel 's if a dram o' licker would go pretty good, only I know 't I ain't got no licker and I ain't got no money to buy none neither. Maybe that's the reason I want it, becase I can't git it, but it does seem as how 't would taste powerful good.'

"Now, Jedge, what would you 'a' done? I didn't want Bill to know 't I was a-sellin' licker, but he 'peared to hanker so after a drink 't I went to the still and got him a pint o' the best I had. Bill's mouth watered when he seen it, and he says, 'Sim, it ain't right fur you to spend so much money fur me — buyin' physic an' licker fur me jes' becase I'm too poorly to git about. I don't reckon I can ever pay you back,' says he, but I 'lowed 't I could spare all I had spent on him, an 't if he wanted to, when he got up agin, he could help me hoe some corn to make up for it.

"Then Bill, he taken a drink o' the licker an' smacked his lips an' says, 'That's mighty fine licker, Sim. What did it cost you?'

"Now, Jedge, I never wanted to lie so bad in all my life, fur I didn't want Bill to know't I was a-makin' licker, because he never could keep nothin' to hisself. So I didn't say nothin' at all, but pretty soon Bill took another swig an' smacked his lips agin an' said, 'Sim, this is powerful fine licker. Where did you git it an' what did you have to pay fur it?'

"Then I says to Bill, 'To tell you the truth, Bill,' says I, 'it didn't cost me nothin' only a little elbow grease.'

"Bill's eyes opened wide an' he said, 'Seein' as how it don't cost you nothin' you might give me another bottle, sence I'm so poorly.' So I give him another bottle, an' the licker seemed to put new life in him. It wasn't long till Bill could git about, and then his ole woman she got better, too.

"One day I told Bill he would have to care fur hisself now. I had cared fur him nigh onto four weeks, an' fed him an' the ole woman, an' now I had a little work to do fur myself. You see, Jedge, I wanted to make a little more licker, fur I was most out. I taken him a bottle o' the licker and a piece o' bacon an' some meal, an' Bill said he wished he knowed some way o' makin' a little money so's 't he could buy some licker when that was gone. An' I jes' laughed an' said 't it would last him a right smart while ef he didn't make a hog of hisself over it.

"An' the next time I seen Bill Duncan was the follerin' week, when him an' the marshals ketched me makin' licker, and cut up my still, an' now you see why he won't look me in the eye.

"Now, Jedge, I don't deny that I been makin' licker, an' I hain't paid no tax on it neither, but I swear to God I won't never make no more. I got ketched an' I reckon it would serve me right to go to jail. I hain't got nothin' to say why you shouldn't send me up. But with the penitentiary lookin' me in the face, I want to ask you, Jedge, to look at me an' then to look at this here man 't has convicted me, an' I ask you, Jedge, or any other man in this here courtroom, if you wouldn't rather be Moonshine Sim than ole Bill Duncan."

Sim Bailey stood in silence, awaiting his sentence. Bill Duncan, stooped and quivering, was gazing at the floor. Every other eye in the great courtroom was upon the sturdy, honest mountaineer, and the silence was broken only by the Judge, who in a husky voice remarked: "The Court will entertain a motion to set aside the verdict of the jury and grant Sim Bailey a new trial."

The Last Man's Club.*

BY ROBERT M. CLUTCH.

HE Property of the Last Man."

Emotion choked the voice of the old man as he slowly spelled the words from the age-worn label which still clung raggedly to a bottle covered with the dust of many years. A mist came before his eyes as he held the old wine up to the light and a sigh escaped his lips as he placed it back on the table.

And this was the end! A long table, with thirty-eight plates, from which no one would eat; thirty-eight chairs, upon which no one would sit; a lonely old man seated at the head of a lonely board, drinking to the memory of his friends, all of whom he had survived.

How sad and how different from the joyous occasion which marked their organization this night sixty-four years before! He could see it just as it happened — thirty-nine young men, in the first flush of their manhood, clinking their glasses around a festive board, wild songs, gay pranks, and all joking about the poor old Last Man to be. It was youth joking about Time; hot blood and inexperience ridiculing halting footsteps and wisdom.

He recalled how they had gathered around at the midnight hour, raised their glasses high in the air and had drunk to him. And now he was to drink to them — drink of the old wine, which they had sealed with solemn rites — to take from the glass a delicious quaff and a sad memory, as he toasted their names one by one.

He recalled them all, the whole thirty-eight, beginning with active young manhood and ending with decrepid old age, as one by one in the different periods of their lives they had passed

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away. For five years, he remembered, they had remained intact. Then the first man died. There was a vacant chair at their next anniversary dinner, and a name was toasted in silence.

Another lapse of time, then a second went, then a third. One had mysteriously disappeared, one had been murdered, two were drowned, three killed on the railroad, and one had cheated the aims of the club by taking his own life. And then came the War of the Rebellion. They were twenty-seven when the great struggle began, but four years later, when it was ended, only nineteen men answered to their names at the following anniversary dinner and the memory of the others was toasted in silence.

The roll of the living grew smaller and that of the dead larger as year after year the survivors met. From young men they had slipped into middle life and from middle life they had become old. And now he was the Last Man. The honor was —

He stopped. The clock had begun to strike twelve. The hour for dissolving the Last Man's Club had arrived.

He listened reverently until the last lingering echo died out. Then he broke the seal of the bottle. With trembling hand he raised the glass to the tapering neck and inclined the bottle so that the crimson liquid bubbled out. He set the bottle on the table, held the glass up to the light and looked at it. Then he glanced down the length of the table until his eyes rested on a vacant chair. For a few seconds he remained silent. A flush mantled his wrinkled cheeks. A light kindled his eyes. His bent form straightened up. He brought the glass down to the level of his lips, raised it again and inclined it toward the chair upon which his eyes were fastened.

Then, in a voice trembling with emotion, he called aloud the first man's name. It was the voice of friendship ringing out across nearly three generations of time — the voice of the Last Man toasting the first.

The second man's name was called out in the same quavering voice, the glass inclined toward another vacant chair, then the third and fourth. Then two little spots glowed out on the old man's cheeks as he drank. His eyes snapped and sparkled under his bushy white brows. He became joyous, careless. He cackled and chuckled in mirth as he called his old comrades by name.

More than once he made reference to some joke that had been buried and forgotten in the dim past.

The glass was emptied and filled again and again. The names were called out, incidents were delved into from the forgotten past as the old man conversed with the imaginary pictures of the men whose memory he was keeping alive.

He stopped and strained his eyes. "Why — why, there's Joe. Poor old Joe. See, Joe, I'm toastin' your mem'ry. Your mem'ry, Joe. I'm the —

"And there's Dick! Dick who was killed at Gettysburg. Killed with his hands on the colors. But I'd know you anywheres. Know you even if you didn't have your uniform on. Here's to you, Dick; here's to — "

He stopped and began to sing a song in a low, cracked voice. It was a strange old song, one musty with the flavor of olden days, with queer rhymings and funny sayings. The old man's voice rose higher, his eyes sparkled brighter, his cheeks grew more flushed. Suddenly his voice became husky, rose to a screech, broke to a whisper, and stopped.

The bottle was more than half emptied now, but still the old man kept at his solemn task. Now they were all toasted. Thirty-eight times had he raised the glass in the air, thirty-eight times had he sipped of the old wine to their memory, thirty-eight times had he called their names one by one. Thirty-eight gleams of joy, thirty-eight pangs of sorrow and it was all over. The Last Man's Club was no more.

A sense of sadness crept over him. He sat down in his chair wearily, and uttered a long-drawn sigh as his head dropped slowly on his bosom. Then the room grew dim and he closed his eyes.

A wild chorus, a confusion of familiar sounds, and a few bars of an old song awakened him. He jumped up, blinked in the light, and looked around him. The song fell upon his ears like the melody of an old poem. It awakened a whole flood of emotion in the old man's soul that held him spell-bound. He listened again. The sound came swelling from all sides, flooding his mind with reminiscences which almost made him weep. It was their drinking song, sung with a full chorus before Death had begun to step in nearly sixty years ago.

He looked down the table and gave a sudden start. He looked again. Was he dreaming? He rubbed his eyes to make sure.

Before him, seated around the board, were the thirty-eight men whose memory he had just toasted.

They were all singing — singing the same old song in the way he could never forget. It was like the voice of Yesterday reaching forth into the Present. He cleared his throat, took a long breath, and joined wildly in with the chorus. He sang the song through and stopped exhausted. He fought for his breath, gulped down a draught of wine, and rested. Then he glanced down the line of men seated around the board, looked at his own place, and stared. It was vacant! His chair was empty. It was the only unoccupied one around the board. He could not understand. He looked again. They were toasting him — The Last Man.

Weakly, he staggered over to the table. With palsied hand, he filled his glass as they did theirs, held it high in the air, and drank. The sides of the room slowly heaved before his eyes; the table became an indistinct streak of white; the thirty-eight guests blurred into two gray lines; then everything turned black. His glass fell from his hand and crashed against the chair. He reeled and swayed for a moment, extended both hands pleadingly towards the table, smiled, then fell heavily to the floor.

They found him there the next morning. The roll of the Last Man's Club was complete. He had gone to join them.

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